

REMARKS

Claims 1-30 are pending in this application. Claims 18 and 26 have been currently amended. Claims 1, 4-7, and 9-17 have been previously withdrawn from consideration. No new matter has been added.

Applicant's counsel wish to thank Examiners Patel and Donaghue for the courtesy, time and attention extended during the telephonic interview on December 12, 2006. The prior art (Lu, Bulfer and Sherman references) and the pending claims were discussed at some length. Applicant's counsel has made amendments to the independent claims that were either discussed, suggested or alluded to during the interview. In particular, the amended claims recite that the at least one other approver is notified of a changed status for the electronic message.

Claims Rejections – 35 USC § 103

4. Claims have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent Application Publication US 2002/0107950 A1 to Lu ("Lu") in view of U.S. Patent Publication US 2006/0036701 to Bulfer et al. ("Bulfer") and in further view of U.S. Patent Publication US 2002/0194177 A1 to Sherman et al. ("Sherman").

Claims 18 and 26 have been amended to recite notifying the at least one other approver of a changed status for the electronic message.

As discussed in the interview and provided on page 7 of the Office Action, both Lu and Bulfer fail to teach "once the electronic message is approved or rejected by one approver, updating a display for the at least one other approver according to a changed status for the electronic message." To supply that which is missing from Lu and Bulfer, the Examiner turns to Sherman that is directed to and discloses methods for synchronizing information between computer systems. In particular, the Examiner points to the subfolder synchronization Sherman teaches at figures 5, 8A and 8B, and at paragraphs [0045], [0059], [0065] and [0075].

A careful reading of Sherman reveals that it does not teach or suggest notifying the at least one other approver of a changed status for an electronic message. The description from Sherman that the Examiner cites is directed only to folders, and not to the e-mail messages or other information structures stored within the folders. The gist of the Sherman reference in general, and of the text the Examiner cites in particular, is synchronization and other processing as applied to folders and subfolders, but not to the messages residing within those folders.

Sherman pointedly does not apply the synchronization processes it teaches to e-mail messages. Sherman does not ignore the subject of e-mail messages – rather, Sherman describes e-mail messages in peripheral contexts, unrelated to the synchronization that is the focus of the patent (see, for example, paragraph [0026]). In fact, Sherman teaches that the synchronization concepts it describes may be applied in other contexts, such as to file directories, task categories, notes, contacts and other categories of information (see paragraph [0077], but Sherman pointedly excludes e-mail messages. All of the alternative embodiments called out in Sherman are directed to categories related to the e-mail messages, but are specifically not directed to the e-mail messages themselves.

In summary, Sherman discusses e-mail messages, and could have included e-mail messages as subject matter for an alternative embodiment of the synchronization concepts it teaches, but specifically chose not to do so. Sherman does not teach notifying at least one other approver of a changed status for an electronic message.

Unlike the cited references, the recited invention is directed specifically to operating electronic messaging systems that provides for a review of messages that are either approved or rejected, and sent for review to at least two approvers, and further upon an action being taken by one approver, provides for notification to the other approvers who have not yet acted on the electronic message. In doing so, the recited invention is concerned with an efficient technique to provide for a review of electronic messages that are routed to at least two approvers. In particular, the recited invention uses a changed status (i.e., approved or rejected) for the electronic message to be the basis for a notification to be sent to the other approvers so they do not have to act on the message. As stated in amended claim 18:

routing an electronic message intended for a first user to at least two approvers, wherein each of the at least two approvers can approve or reject the electronic message;

presenting the electronic message on a display to at least one of the approvers for approval or rejection;

determining whether the electronic message is approved or rejected by applying a predetermined policy toward approval or rejection actions by the at least one of the approvers presented with the electronic message;

routing the electronic message to the first user if the electronic message is approved; and

once the electronic message is approved or rejected by one approver, ~~updating a display for~~ notifying the at least one other approver ~~according to~~ of a changed status for the electronic message.

Independent claims 18 and 26 both require notifying at least one other approver of a changed status for an electronic message. The Examiner admits that neither Lu nor Bulfer teach this limitation, and as described above, Sherman does not supply that which is missing from Lu and Bulfer. At least for these reasons, claims 18 and 26 are not obvious in view of the cited references and should be allowed.

Since claims 2, 3, 19-25 depend from allowable claim 18, and claims 8 and 27-30 depend from allowable claim 26, these claims should also be allowed.

In view of the above remarks, Applicant submits that the pending application is in condition for allowance, and such action is respectfully solicited. Please charge any fees not covered or credit any overpayments to Deposit Account No. 08-0219.

Respectfully submitted,

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